

Sampling Australia – A showcase of Eucalypts

Paul Thompson AILA

Pursuit of a passion for Eucalypts for botanist Dean Nicolle has produced a splendid reference resource for science and designers of open space. You don't have to be besotted by our myriad of gum trees to be impressed by this wonderful private 32.5 hectare Arboretum in Currency Creek, South Australia. A recent public open day was attended by about forty people from around South Australia and interstate. We were easily engaged by Botanist Eucalypt Researcher, Dean Nicolle, who shared some of his tree stories as we flowed from one species to another.

This serious systematic collection of *Eucalyptus*, *Corymbia* and *Angophora* began about fourteen years ago with the ambition of collecting together as wide a range of our approximate 900 species of Gum trees as possible. There are now about 90% of all species represented. This amounts to about 6000 individual plants grown from about 1600 seed accessions, all collected by Dean Nicolle. The complete history of every individual plant is known. Every species has a full herbarium specimen lodged including GPS of the collection location.

**Sampling Australia
– A showcase of
Eucalypts**

Paul Thompson AILA



Eucalyptus erythrocorys, a popular street tree in California

Review

Current research projects include the investigation of how species respond to fire, damage and pruning. Knowledge of the growth habits have been regularly monitored and were freely explained by Dean Nicolle during his tour. Here we have a person who is generous with a broad range of precious information. As an advocate for these trees, Nicolle spreads the word at every opportunity, with the aim to dispel misconceptions whilst exciting others to learn, protect and use more of our most prominent group of plants.



Eucalyptus pleurocarpa can become a dense screen for coastal areas

Not all species have thrived, particularly those from both Northern Australia and high rainfall areas. The site has a true Mediterranean climate, free draining soil of neutral pH with 450mm annual rainfall. The site fits in the middle of climatic conditions for a large part of southern Australia. Here desert and Mallee thrive, and species from temperate rainforests are slow.

No other place in the world has such a collection. It is here we can compare species; learn about durability, growth, character. We may also find the perfect small tree, the most distinctive form. Here we can sort out the differences in *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* and *Eucalyptus pauciflora* and many other important trees common in the designed landscape. We may find unknown trees that satisfy many of the criteria demanded from a large range of horticultural conditions and designer needs.

LAonline – Review

My visit to Currency Creek Arboretum was preceded by an obligatory visit to the 80 year old Waite Arboretum in Adelaide. This was part of research into selection of species for the Stage Two of the Australian Garden at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne, Victoria. Books are never enough. Visiting 800 species in the wild as Dean has done requires unusual commitment. Seeing them in one place and listening to the expert words of Nicolle as guide is more instructive. Growth in cultivation can vary remarkably from that in the natural range. One only has to look at the pictures in *A Field Guide to Eucalypts* to see the cultivation difference for many popular trees such as *Eucalyptus scoparia* and *Eucalyptus nicholii*, to name two. Visiting Currency Creek and the Waite Arboreta assisted decisions on selection efficiently and satisfactorily.

The collection is full of surprises even for the experienced. Certainly it is full of lessons for us all, and the lessons will increase with maturity. It is an insight into what one person can achieve with a single minded determination and application. A guided visit is essential and highly recommended, not only for those involved in our plants or our landscape.



Eucalyptus gardneri with striking foliage and flower



Eucalyptus latens a dry tolerant mallee that displays its red buds for 6 months

Note: Dean Nicolle periodically has free guided public open days and is available by appointment for private tours and consultation. Visit www.dn.com.au/

References

Brooker, M. & Kleinig, D. (1999). *A Field Guide to Eucalypts*, Blooming Books.